

AAA report shows Montana kids' seat belt use lacking

About 33 percent of Helena area middle school children rode to school unbuckled in a recent AAA Montana observational survey of seat belt use.

Local AAA officials said in a press release that recent federal data shows children ages 8 to 15 riding unbuckled and dying in car crashes at rates approaching those of adults.

Feb. 8-14 was Child Passenger Safety Week, and AAA was emphasizing the importance of proper seat belt and restraint use with children of all ages.

"As kids get older — both here and nationwide, they become less likely to wear their seat belts and become more likely to die in car crashes," said Charity Watt Levis. "Many parents might relent on seat belt use for the short drive to school, but unbuckled children are at risk during these routine daily trips during the morning rush. These middle school students will soon be riding in cars driven by teenage siblings and friends, making it all the more important that they be buckled up. Parents and others need to make these older children into full-time seat belt users now."

AAA Montana observed

students as they were driven to Helena and East Helena middle schools during January.

In all, 272 students were observed, 33 percent of whom were unbuckled. Drivers not using seat belts was lower at 31 percent.

Around the country, AAA observed nearly 6,000 students arriving at school and found a strong relationship between driver seat belt use and young passenger seat belt use.

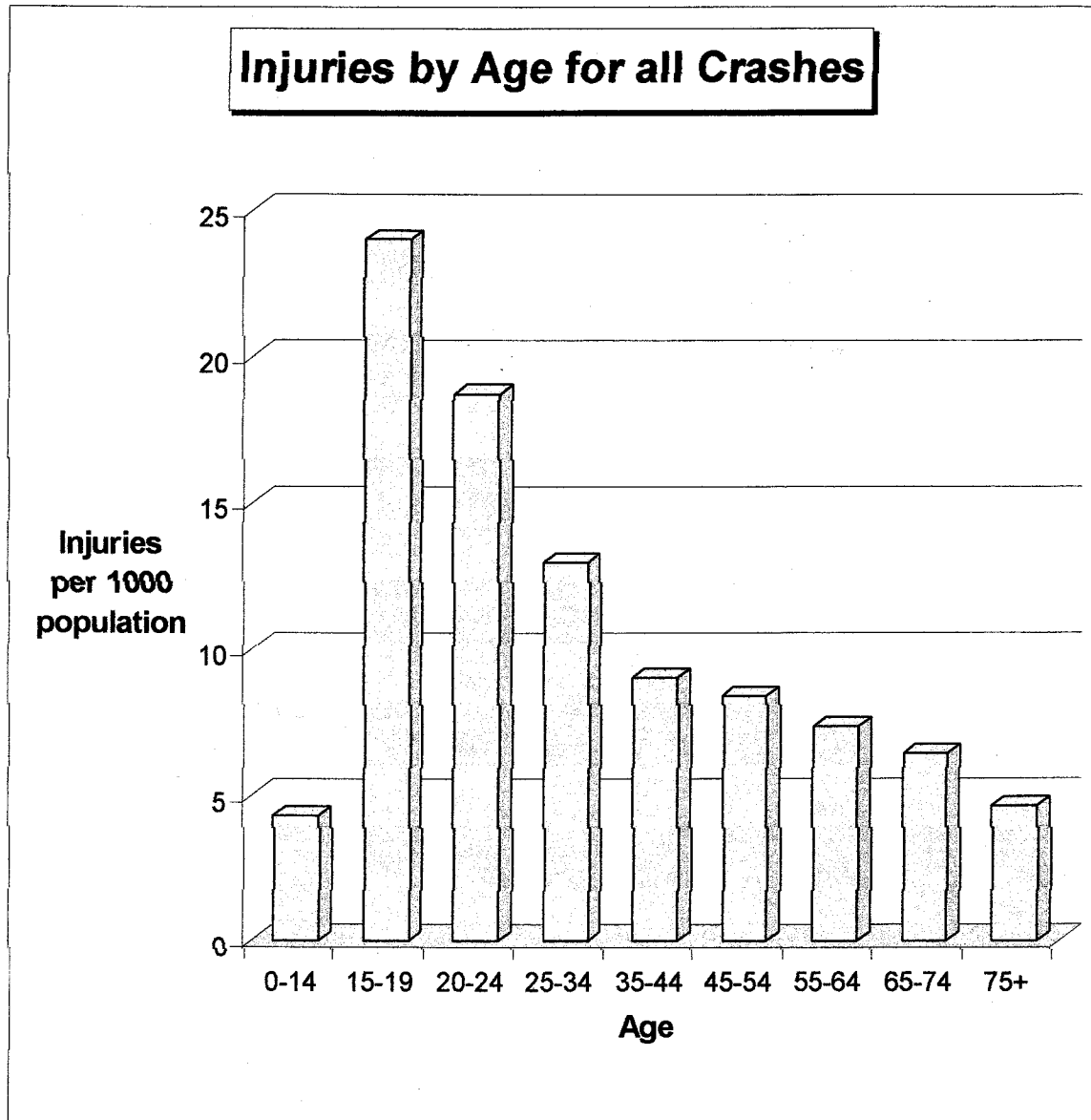
Watts-Levis said data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that as children get older, their fatality rates go up and their seat belt usage goes down.

In 2002, the most recent data available, 1,209 children ages 8-15 were killed while riding in cars — up 8 percent from 2001.

Other age groups of children — 0-3 and 4-7 — saw fatalities decrease by 6 percent and 15 percent, respectively, during the same period.

Fifty-six percent of the older children killed in car crashes were not wearing their seat belts, a rate that approaches the 58 percent non-use rate for adults in fatal crashes.

Figure 6



6. Young Driver Crashes

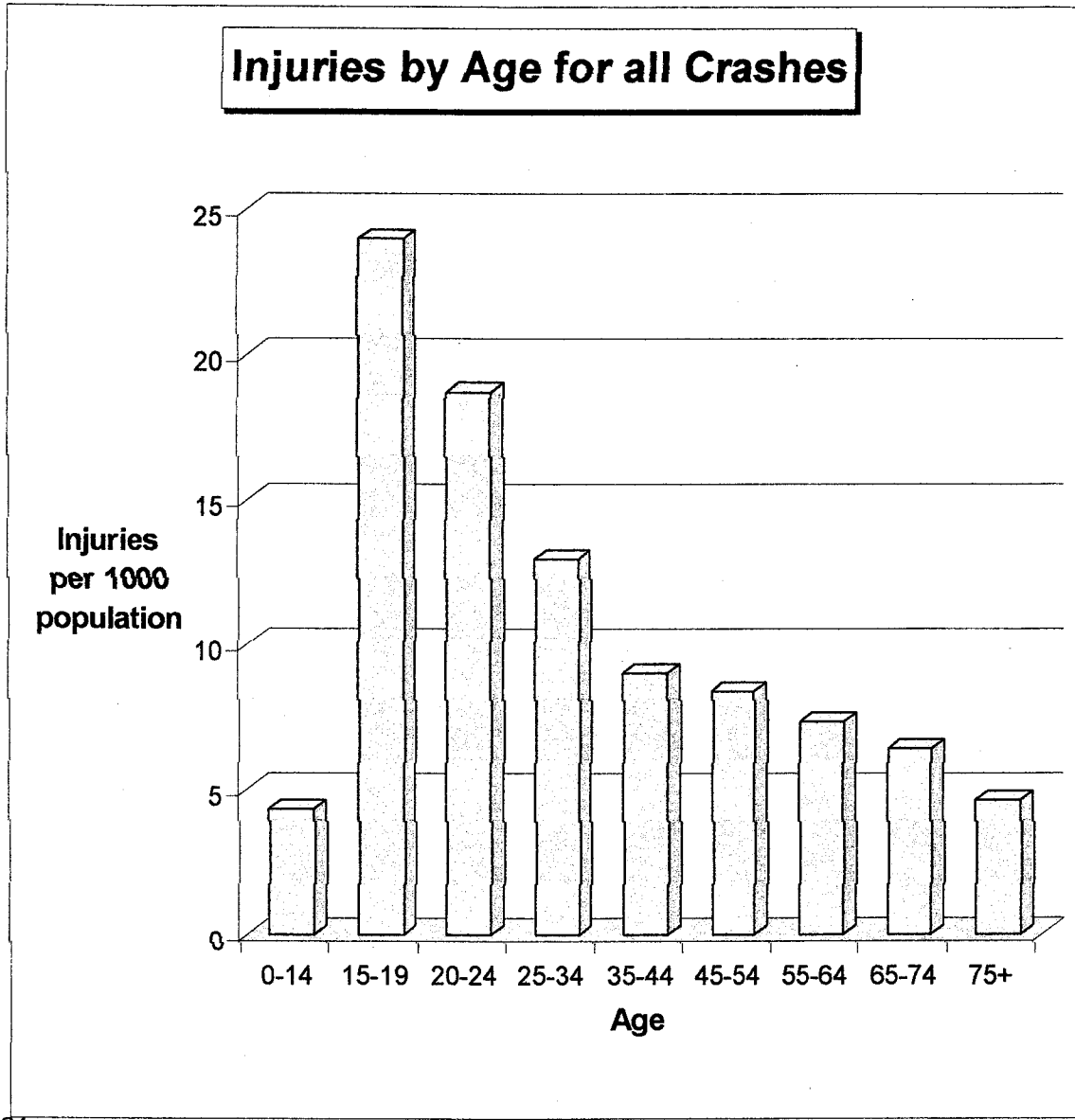
This section examines the age of the drivers that are involved in traffic crashes. Crash rates per one thousand licensed drivers are calculated. This data provides additional information to improve decisions on targeting specific high-risk age groups. Table 33 contains this age related data.

Table 33 Crashes by Age of Driver (2007 Crash Data)					
Age	Licensed Drivers (SFY2007)	Drivers in Crashes	Crashes per 1000 Licenses	Drivers in Fatal Crashes	Fatal Crashes per 1000 Licenses
Under 16	2,219	576	260	4	2.80
16	7,340	1,046	143	2	0.27
17	9,631	1,240	129	2	0.21
18	11,362	1,379	121	8	0.70
19	11,880	1,211	102	9	0.76
20	12,415	1,082	87	7	0.56
Under 21	54,847	6,534	119	32	0.58
21-24	49,345	3,648	74	41	0.83
25-29	66,585	3,251	49	28	0.42
30-34	55,002	2,457	45	24	0.44
35-44	115,990	4,815	42	49	0.42
45-54	150,121	5,268	35	74	0.49
55-64	124,593	3,538	28	39	0.31
65-74	71,592	1,745	24	27	0.38
75+	47,678	1,211	25	10	0.21

Source: TIS – Montana Department of Transportation
 Motor Vehicle Division – Department of Justice

Young drivers are over-represented in traffic crashes based upon the number of licensed drivers. Nationally the number of miles driven by teens is less than for drivers of all ages. In fact teens drive approximately 35% fewer miles than average adults. If teen drivers in Montana are similar to the teens across America, then their rate of crashes per vehicle miles driven would be even more extreme than the rate per licensed

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